

## **QA4 – OPC-3**

### **QUESTION:**

I saw a family in clinic today and the Mother posed this question to me.

She has three children aged 8, 4, and 2. A good friend of hers has proposed that she provide a daily supplement of the antioxidant OPC-3 to her diet and to the diets of her children. The friend is interested in holistic medicine, ingests the product, and is convinced that ‘it helps’. The children are apparently healthy and growing well. What is OPC-3 (oligomeric proanthocyanidins)? What is the function? The dose? Are there side effects for children? Are there concerns about short-term vs. long-term ingestion? Is there a current FDA recommendation about this product? What resources might I suggest so that she could appropriately evaluate this type of product?

### **ANSWER:**

Oligomeric proanthocyanidins are a derivative of pycnogenols (Greek for “pycno” (thicken) and “gen”(to generate). They are marketed as powerful antioxidants to “protect against damaging elements in our environment that work against our immune system and accelerate aging”. They are purported to be isolated from grape seeds and pine bark.

Unfortunately, there are no clinical trials involving children so safety and efficacy cannot be established. Also, since there is no manufacturer’s name, we cannot even check with the manufacturer to determine content, strength, etc., if this information is even available. Over the counter products are not FDA approved and, as a result, there is no reporting mechanism for side effects or adverse reactions of these products. So it would be a risk to give to any child based on anecdotal information.

Another factor here is the fact that antioxidants are available in regular diets so the parent needs to be reassured that he or she is providing nutritional adequacy without the addition of an OPC product.

General guidelines for using complimentary products include: What is in it? Is it safe? Is it effective? What is the cost? If the first three questions cannot be answered, then the product would not be recommended.

References:

- 1) Kemper, Kathi, The Holistic Pediatrician, Parper Perennial, 1996. Lawrence Review of Natural Products, 1-800-223-0554.
- 2) Varro, Tyler, Honest Herbal & Herbs of Choice, Pharmaceutical Products Press, 1992, 1994.
- 3) PDR for Herbal Products.